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ABSTRACT

Over the past 5 years, McKnight Middle School in Renton, Washington, has instituted a new discipline policy, integrated a study skills program throughout the curriculum, upgraded the curriculum, created several reward and recognition policies for both students and teachers, and increased parent and district involvement. The discipline policy features new attendance rules, a new code of conduct, the use of inschool suspensions, and a vandalism prevention program. After years with a reputation for student misbehavior, McKnight now has the lowest suspension rate in the district and vandalism costs have been cut substantially. The study skills program includes schoolwide formats for assignments, rules for keeping school notebooks organized, and training in listening, note-taking, reading, and writing skills. Curricular improvements include block teaching of social studies and language arts, a reading program, and a special math program placing students by individual achievement level. Recognition is provided through awards assemblies, special honors for students completing assignments, and broadcast acknowledgment of special efforts by students or staff members. District support for faculty development and the growth of a strong parents' group have also aided school improvement. Just starting are a substance abuse program and expanded curriculum development efforts. (PGD)

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Success for Students Key to Improvement Programs at McKnight Middle School



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Success for Students Key to Improvement Programs at McKnight Middle School

At McKnight Middle School in Renton, Washington, schoolwide improvement efforts over the past five years have focused on increasing student success. Located in a suburban community near Seattle, the school serves 565 students in grades 7 and 8. Enrollment has been steadily declining, 10.8 percent of students come from lower income families, and there is a 17 percent minority student population. Students in the middle class community come to McKnight from four feeder elementary schools and then separate to continue at the three high schools in Renton School District #403.

Prior to schoolwide improvement efforts, the school was considered to be "tough," with a reputation for truant students and drug and discipline problems. There was no common focus among the staff, and there was little parent involvement: no parent organization existed to tie parents to the school.

Since 1980, major new efforts at the school have eliminated this reputation and resulted in improved student performance:

- Institution of a schoolwide code of conduct and discipline program
- Adoption of a study skills program integrated throughout the curriculum for all students
- The creation of numerous reward and recognition programs for both students and teachers
- Increased parent involvement in school activities

School Environment First Focus

A first major effort to change the school took place in 1980-81, with new Assistant Principal Jerry House charged with solving discipline problems. A new attendance policy was established for all students in the school and a schoolwide code of conduct was developed. Students were informed of behavior expectations, and all teachers were expected to follow the new policy.



McKNIGHT MIDDLE SCHOOL

A focus on success for students is the key to improvement efforts at McKnight Middle School.



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The school had historically relied on suspension of students with discipline problems. An in-school pre-suspension (ISPS) program was established in 1981-82. For infractions of the school code of conduct, students spent time in ISPS, working with the supervising aide to deal with their behaviors. Intervention prior to major infractions was effective, and the incidence of student discipline problems has been drastically reduced. In 1981-82, 395 student days were spent in ISPS; in 1984-85, 195 student days were recorded. McKnight now has the lowest suspension rate of all schools in the district.

The discipline policy is now included in student handbooks, given to all students at the beginning of the year. In all first period homeroom classes during the first week of school, teachers read through the handbook and discuss the code of conduct with students. At the end of the week, students are given an acknowledgement slip which they take home to parents and return to the school with the parent's signature.

While working to solve discipline problems, the extensive vandalism in the school was also addressed through a schoolwide Vandalism Prevention Program established in 1981-82. For every dollar saved over the previous year's cost of vandalism to the school facility, 50 cents is returned to the student body fund and students are involved in making decisions about how that recovered money is spent. Funds have been used to purchase library books, a juke box for the student recreation area, blackout curtains for classrooms and other items that contribute to a school environment that is oriented to students. By reporting or discouraging vandalism, students are taking responsibility for the way they want their school to be, and vandalism costs to the school have been drastically reduced. In the 1978-79 school year, vandalism costs at the school were over \$6,850; in 1982-83, the second year of the prevention program, that figure dropped to about \$1,650.

Study Skills Program

Another major effort at the school focused on the creation of a study skills program for all students and its incorporation across the curriculum. This program, begun in 1983-84, was designed to help students learn how to learn and increase their interest and involvement in school.

First, the program specifies individual responsibilities for all students. There are schoolwide standards which require that all students have and carry a three-ring binder in which are a monthly calendar to keep track of

activities and dividers for class assignments. Notebook checks take place periodically, and students are expected to keep their school work organized in these notebooks.

In addition, all students in all classes, both academic and electives, must use a specified heading for all assignments turned in. Students must note their name, the subject and period, the date and assignment title and/or page numbers. Teachers all require this method of identification on all homework and in-class assignments.

These expectations of students are announced at the beginning of each school year. Other study skills are taught in units as part of the language arts and social studies curriculum throughout the year. Major components of the study skills program include:

- Listening skills, or "Give me Five": eyes on speaker, mouth quiet, body facing speaker, hands are free, ears are listening
- Outlining skills using a "framed outline": teachers pass out a modified note-taking sheet that includes a narrative outline of a presentation and students fill in key points as the presentation is made
- Multi-pass reading: a method for scanning and reading information to make sure all main points are understood
- Note-taking techniques: paraphrasing strategies, mapping of information and other methods for taking notes in reading and math classes and during audio-visual presentations
- Test-taking skills: how to prepare for tests, strategies for use in objective tests
- Writing skills: how to diagram the ideas to be included and "C.O.P.S.", special attention to Capitalization, Overall appearance of the paper, Punctuation and Spelling.

Graphic reminders of C.O.P.S. and other study skills are posted in classrooms and around the school, and all teachers are provided with lesson plans to reinforce the use of these study skills throughout the school year.

Curriculum Revisions

As these programs were being instituted in the school, task forces of teachers were examining the school curriculum to identify areas for

improvement. Every teacher in the building was involved in this important effort. As a result, innovative instructional approaches have been implemented:

- During the seven-period school day, social studies and language arts are taught in blocks of time by teams of teachers in adjoining classrooms. In grade 7, students have one three-period block of time plus four other class periods in which they take science, math, physical education and electives. In grade 8, students attend a two-period block and five other classes. Block teachers coordinate instructional content and students move between the two classrooms as needed.
- Daily, from 12:10 to 12:30 following the lunch break, all students and teachers take time out for "R & R," a 20-minute reading and relaxation period. This program emphasizes the importance of reading, quiets students after the diversions of the lunch period and quickly returns the school to concentration on classwork.
- A special math program is now used across the district in which students are placed at individual achievement levels in one of the five math sections. Sixth grade teacher recommendations determine placement, and students can change levels during the year. All students transferring into the school are tested in math for placement.

Over the past three years, the school has reviewed and revised the entire instructional program to include additional health and science, a multicultural component in the social studies curriculum, a required computer literacy course and a move from a quarterly schedule to trimesters to facilitate increased requirements while maintaining the opportunity for a wide range of electives.

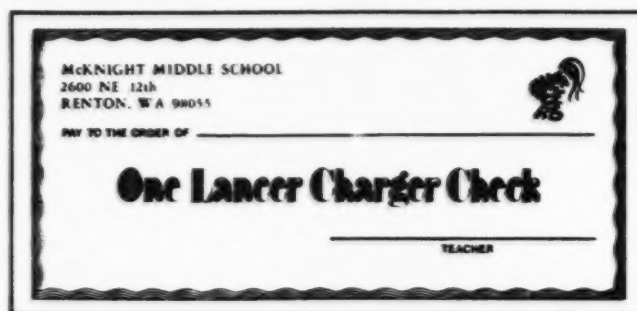
Recognition and Rewards

To refocus students on ways in which they are successful, an extensive program of recognition and rewards has been established in the school. These activities include:

- Three awards assemblies are held each year to honor students who have displayed

outstanding academic achievement, initiative or improvement, plus those who excel in sports, who have completed all homework for the semester, who have perfect attendance, for citizenship, essay and poster contest winners and for outstanding community service. Organized by the teachers, these assemblies include the awarding of certificates to honorees before the entire student body. Nearly 100 students have been honored at each assembly in the past year.

- The Lancer Charger program honors students who have turned in all assignments. At the end of each grading period, students collect signatures on "Lancer Charger Checks" from a minimum of four teachers attesting to completion of all assignments to qualify for Charger membership and awards. Awards vary each period, and have included such items as pennants, pens, pencils and pins. Cumulative awards are also made, with students collecting stickers throughout the year toward end-of-year awards. Last year, eighth graders who had collected sufficient stickers received hooded sweatshirts from the high schools they would be attending.



Students collect "Lancer Charger Checks" for completing all assignments which apply toward special awards.

- A weekly program to recognize all members of the school community is called "Friday Morning Broadcast." After the daily announcements each Friday, messages of thanks, commendation or acknowledgement of student or staff contributions are read in a specially-produced "broadcast" by selected student readers. Messages range from improvement in one class or completion of all homework, to an athletic achievement, an award received or the return of a lost item. Students often thank teachers for help, teachers and

administrators commend students (or each other), and there are comments of thanks or praise for non-teaching staff. This program has been very successful, and messages are posted in a special case in the hallway as an additional recognition.

District and Parent Support

Much of the improvement work at McKnight was instituted by then-principal Debbie Sall and school Assistant Principal Jerry House. A district approach based on goal setting at the district, building and individual levels has supported these improvement efforts. Goals are communicated through newsletters and faculty and student handouts and are announced to parents.

Individual teacher goals are tied to building and district goals. Teachers identify goals in the four areas of instructional skills, classroom management, professional growth and one other area of choice, and work toward them throughout the year. Pre-conferences, observations and post-conferences are held to evaluate teacher progress toward goals, with the building evaluation philosophy emphasizing praise for quality instruction and that every teacher has areas in which to improve.

To assist in meeting building and individual goals, the district provides funds for conference attendance, classes and an extensive program of inservice activities for district teachers. The emphasis in these inservice sessions, often taught by district staff, is on classroom knowledge and skills. In addition, building staff occasionally make inservice presentations at regularly-held faculty meetings.

Further support for school improvement efforts also now comes from parents. A strong parents' organization has developed, and parents are involved in many activities for students at the school. More than 400 parents attended the school's open house in this fall, and approximately 30 parent volunteers are working with staff every week.

Expanding Improvements

Two major efforts are currently under way to continue improvement at McKnight. The first is the institution of a school program to combat potential problems with student drug and alcohol abuse. As part of a districtwide response to community concerns, five staff members from the school have been appointed to the Drug-Alcohol Resource Referral Team (DARRT) and have been trained with teams from other schools. McKnight

applied for and received a district grant to expand the program, and two team members have received extensive counseling training and are now an important resource in the school.

The other effort is concentrated on developing an in-school cycle of curriculum improvement. Principal Tom Bailey, new to the school this year, appointed a 15-member staff committee to develop an instructional committee structure for school improvement. Working with the staff, this group identified five improvement areas: Creative Activities (Music, Occupational Versatility, Art, Photography); Communication Skills (Language Arts, Chapter I Program, Reading, Gifted Program, Special Education); Personal Well Being (Health, Nurse, Physical Education, Home Economics); Understanding People (Social Studies, Counselors, Peer Tutoring, Library, Special Education); and High Technology (Mathematics, Science, Computers, Special Education). From each of these areas one staff member will be selected as a representative on a Faculty Advisory Committee to steer improvement efforts in the school.

The institution of this structure is intended to increase staff involvement in instructional and developmental decision making, will provide the mechanism for establishing clear schoolwide goals and will improve communications among staff in the school. The Faculty Advisory Committee and the five improvement committees will work together to continue to improve programs at McKnight.

Students are more involved in the school, parent involvement has increased, and teachers are dedicated to improving instructional programs. The school climate has improved, and results are showing that student academic achievement levels are rising: on California Achievement Tests administered during the 1984-85 school year, student test scores rose between 5 and 11 percentage points above the previous year in all basic skills areas except spelling.

These and other efforts to improve instructional programs at McKnight have been effective in reducing problems and in focusing students and staff on success. The school has shed its "tough" reputation, and in 1985, the school was recognized for its accomplishments in the U.S. Secondary School Recognition Program.

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